



**THE
FEMININE
BEAUTY
IDEAL
AMONG
CAMBODIAN
WOMEN**

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WHAT IS THE BEAUTY STANDARD IN CAMBODIA?

BEFORE WESTERN COLONIZATION, ASIAN SOCIETIES HAD ALREADY ESTABLISHED CERTAIN PREFERENCES INVOLVING SKIN COLOR, FACIAL FEATURES, HEIGHT, AND BODY SHAPES. THESE CHARACTERISTICS WERE CREATED DUE TO AESTHETICS AND CLASSISM. AFTER WESTERN COLONIZATION TOOK PLACE, THESE STANDARDS WERE FURTHER INTENSIFIED DUE TO COLORISM RATHER THAN AESTHETICS. IN CAMBODIA, THESE STANDARDS FOR THE WOMEN WERE DEFINED BY HAVING "WHITE SKIN, HEIGHT, A SLIM BODY, A FULL CHEST, AND ATTRACTIVE FACIAL FEATURES SUCH AS SOFT SKIN, A SHARP NOSE, OVAL OR V-SHAPED FACIAL STRUCTURE, TWO-LAYER EYELASHES, WHITE TEETH, AND LONG, SMOOTH, STRAIGHT HAIR" (TOCH, 2020). IF ONE HAD A DARKER COMPLEXION, THEY WERE ASSUMED TO BE OF LOWER STATUS. THIS IS BECAUSE EUROPEAN STANDARDS CONSIDERED DARKER SKIN TO BE THE RESULT OF LOTS OF EXPOSURE TO SUNLIGHT. WHICH THEN LED TO THE ASSUMPTION THAT THEY DID LABORIOUS WORK (E.G., FARMING). THEREFORE, THOSE WITH WHITE SKIN WERE FAVORED WITHIN SOCIETY BECAUSE THEY WERE CONSIDERED WEALTHY ENOUGH TO STAY AWAY FROM LABORIOUS WORK.



FAMOUS
CAMBODIAN
SINGER
TOUCH
SREYNICH
WITH
MAKEUP AND
WITHOUT

COLONIALISM AND COLORISM

IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY, THE THAILAND KINGDOM AND VIETNAM KINGDOM HAD CONFLICT THAT HAD CROSSED ONTO CAMBODIAN TERRITORY AND ALMOST RESULTED IN THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CAMBODIA. DUE TO THIS EVENT AND THAILAND INVADING CAMBODIA BEFORE, THE CAMBODIAN KING ASKED FRANCE FOR PROTECTION ON AUGUST 11TH, 1863. THOUGH FRANCE PROVIDED ENOUGH PROTECTION TO CAMBODIA FROM ITS NEIGHBORING ENEMIES, THIS PROTECTION HAD ONLY LASTED FOR A YEAR BEFORE IT TURNED INTO FULLY FLEDGED COLONIALISM (CHANDLER). THUS, CAUSING CAMBODIANS TO VIEW FRENCH COLONIALIST WITH LIGHTER SKIN COMPLEXION AS HIGHER-CLASS. THE IDEALS THAT THE FRENCH HAD ROOTED WITHIN CAMBODIA WOULD CAUSE CAMBODIANS TO PARTAKE IN COLORISM EVEN TO THIS DAY. IN REFERENCE TO HUNTER (2007), "COLORISM, OR SKIN COLOR STRATIFICATION, IS A PROCESS THAT PRIVILEGES LIGHT-SKINNED PEOPLE OF COLOR OVER DARK IN AREAS SUCH AS INCOME, EDUCATION, HOUSING, AND THE MARRIAGE MARKET" (P. 237).



WHITENING CREAMS

SO, WHAT DO CAMBODIAN WOMEN WHO WANT TO ACHIEVE THE BEAUTY STANDARD DO WHEN THEY DON'T HAVE WHITE SKIN? THEY RESORT TO WHITENING CREAMS. WOMEN WHO CAN AFFORD OR HAVE ACCESS TO WHITENING CREAMS WILL USE THEM TO ACHIEVE WHITE SKIN. IN REFERENCE TO TAI AND SUKUMARAN (2019), WHITENING CREAMS OR WHITENING LOTIONS DO NOT INSTANTLY TURN YOUR SKIN WHITE, BUT THEY WILL SLOWLY LIGHTEN THE PIGMENT OF YOUR SKIN OVER TIME. NOT ALL THESE PRODUCTS WILL WORK, HOWEVER, ONES THAT DO WORK, IF CONSISTENTLY USED FOR A LONG TIME (E.G., A MONTH) SOME USERS WILL SEE RESULTS. THOUGH USERS MAY SEE RESULTS, SOMETIMES THE RESULTS WILL LOOK UNNATURAL MOST LIKELY DUE TO THAT FACT THAT IT IS A CHEMICAL RESULT AND NOT A NATURAL METHOD (E.G., AVOIDING SUNLIGHT), ALSO BECAUSE IT IS NOT ONE'S ORIGINAL SKIN COMPLEXION.

IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THESE WHITENING PRODUCTS ARE NOT ALWAYS SAFE, SOME WOMEN WHO HAVE ACCESS TO WHITENING PRODUCTS WILL HAVE ACCESS TO ONES THAT ARE NON-STANDARDIZED PRODUCTS. THESE PRODUCTS "CAN CAUSE ALLERGIC REACTIONS AND HEALTH ISSUES, IN PARTICULAR, PRODUCTS THAT CONTAIN HIGH AMOUNTS OF IRON, CADMIUM, ZINC AND OTHER CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES FOUND IN LIPSTICKS, HAIR DYES, AND MAKEUP" (TOCH, 2020). THE KEY INGREDIENT THAT WORKS TO LIGHTEN THE SKIN IS MERCURY. ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DERMATOLOGY ASSOCIATION, SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS THAT CONTAIN MERCURY CAN BE DAMAGING TO YOUR KIDNEYS, NERVES, AND CAUSE MERCURY POISONING. SINCE KIDNEYS ARE SENSITIVE, WHEN IN CONTACT WITH MERCURY, IT WILL GATHER IN THE KIDNEYS AND BECOME EXPOSED TO ITS TISSUES, THEREFORE, CAUSING DAMAGE (ATS DR CDC). IN ADDITION, WHEN IN CONTACT WITH YOUR NERVES IT CAN LEAD TO "PERMANENT NUMBNESS OR TINGLING IN YOUR HANDS, FEET, OR AROUND YOUR MOUTH" (AAD). LASTLY, MERCURY POISONING CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH EYESIGHT, HEARING, IRRITABILITY, SHYNESS, AND TREMORS (AAD).

IN CONCLUSION

THE BEAUTY STANDARDS THAT HAVE CIRCULATED THROUGH CAMBODIA FOR CENTURIES HAVE CAUSED WOMEN TO PUT THEIR HEALTH AT RISK. IT HAS BEEN ROOTED IN OUR PEOPLE FOR SO LONG THAT SOME WILL EVEN CHOOSE TO LISTEN TO MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WITH WHITE SKIN OVER THEIR FELLOW KHMER PEOPLE WHO HAVE A DARKER SKIN COMPLEXION, WHO ARE ALSO MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS (LYDA, 2021). EVEN OUR MISS CAMBODIA (2017), MISS UNIVERSE CAMBODIA (2020), MISS WORLD CAMBODIA (2020) ARE ALL LIGHT COMPLEXIONS. THOUGH THEY ARE BEAUTIFUL WOMEN, I HOPE OUR DARKER-SKINNED CAMBODIANS WILL GET THE REPRESENTATION THEY DESERVE.



MISS UNIVERSE CAMBODIA 2020

- SARITA RETH



ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHANDLER, DAVID. "CAMBODIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW." ASIA SOCIETY, 2021, ASIASOCIETY.ORG/EDUCATION/CAMBODIA-HISTORICAL-OVERVIEW.

- This article was used to describe the Cambodian history regarding its past relationships with Thailand and Vietnam. In addition, Cambodia reaching out to the French for protection and resulting in colonialism. Leaving the French to rule Cambodia for a total of 90 years and implementing Western European standards among Cambodians before their rulership ended in the 1950s.

GRANT, HILARY. "MANIPULATIONS OF CAMBODIAN NATIONALISM: FROM FRENCH COLONIAL RULE TO CURRENT POLITY." MAPPING POLITICS 1 (2009): 30-38.

- This article was also used to describe the history of France's colonial rule in Cambodia. This article goes into a more detail about the French rulership including the origins of superiority of ethnic Khmer. Furthermore, this article discusses how the French unintentionally caused conflict between Thailand and Cambodia through promoting Thai immigration to Cambodia.

HUNTER, M. "THE PERSISTENT PROBLEM OF COLORISM: SKIN TONE, STATUS, AND INEQUALITY." SOCIOLOGY COMPASS 1 (2007): 237-254.

- This article was used for its quote regarding the definition of colorism. This article discusses how colorism has been a persistent problem in the United States for people of color. This article describes the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans with skin color. Furthermore, this article discusses the benefits that lighter skinned people experience.

RYABOV, I. COLORISM AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF ASIAN AMERICANS: EVIDENCE FROM THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH. SOC PSYCHOL EDUC 19, 303-324 (2016).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-015-9327-5>

- The article describes the origins of colorism in Asia that stems from Europeans. This article was used for its description on the different assumptions of darker skin compared to lighter skin. This article describes that darker-skinned folks were assumed to be laborious workers while those with lighter skin were considered higher class.

LAM, EMILLY. "COLORISM AND THE CAMBODIAN IDEAL OF WHITE BEAUTY." BOELL, 22 OCT. 2019, KH.BOELL.ORG/EN/2019/10/22/COLORISM-AND-CAMBODIAN-IDEAL-WHITE-BEAUTY.

- This article was used to describe the beauty standard within Cambodia. This article discusses colorism within Cambodia and the history of Cambodians preference for light skin over dark skin. This article also discusses how light skin in Cambodia increases women's social capital and adds to the social construction of beauty.

"LATEST STORIES." COLORING CAMBODIA, 16 MAY 2021, WWW.COLORINGCAMBODIA.COM/LYDA.

- This article was used for Lyda's personal experience with colorism from other Cambodians as a Khmer nurse. She states that it is common for Khmer patients to disregard her comments about their health because she is of darker complexion. Whereas, if a white nurse had said the same thing, they would agree and say that the white nurse is very knowledgeable.

"MERCURY." CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, 14 OCT. 2015,

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/sites/toxline/mercury_toxline.html#:~:text=metallic%20mercury%20vapor-,the%20kidneys%20are%20also%20sensitive%20to%20the%20effects%20of%20mercury,enough%20amounts%20enter%20the%20body.

- This article was used in support of AAD's claim of the negative effects that mercury has on kidneys. This article discusses the different types of mercury and the different ways to test for mercury levels within the body. This article also discusses how some people may be exposed to higher levels of mercury through diet.

"SKIN LIGHTENER CONTAINING MERCURY CAN CAUSE SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS." AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DERMATOLOGY, 2021, WWW.AAD.ORG/PUBLIC/COSMETIC/AGE-SPOTS-MARKS/SKIN-LIGHTENER-CONTAINING-MERCURY-CAUSE-HEALTH-PROBLEMS.

- This article was used to discuss the negative effects of skin lightening products. One of the negative effects is that skin lightening products include mercury. Thus, describing how mercury can damage your kidneys, nerves, eyesight, and hearing. This article also informs readers on how to check skin lightening products on whether it uses mercury. Listing the different names mercury goes by.

TAI, CRYSTAL, AND TASHNY SUKUMARAN. "THE BACKLASH AGAINST ASIA'S ADDICTION TO WHITER SKIN HAS BEGUN." SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, 3 FEB. 2019, WWW.SCMP.COM/WEEK-ASIA/SOCIETY/ARTICLE/2184747/ASIAS-ADDICTION-WHITER-SKIN-RUNS-DEEP-BACKLASH-HAS-BEGUN.

- This article was used to describe how skin lightening products work. This article discusses that skin lightening products don't always work but ones that do will usually lighten your skin over long period of time. In addition, the results aren't always natural looking due to the chemicals of the product such as mercury.

TOCH, THINA. "BEAUTY STANDARD DANGERS IN CAMBODIA." FOCUS, 2 OCT. 2020,

focus-cambodia.com/article/beauty-standard-dangers-in-cambodia/#:~:text=sources%20that%20define%20beauty%20standards,linked%20to%20many%20societal%20changes&text=she%20said%2c%20e%280%9c%20the%20majority%20of,big%20chest%20to%20look%20attractive.

focus-cambodia.com/article/beauty-standard-dangers-in-cambodia/#:~:text=sources%20that%20define%20beauty%20standards,linked%20to%20many%20societal%20changes&text=she%20said%2c%20e%280%9c%20the%20majority%20of,big%20chest%20to%20look%20attractive.

- This article was used for its quote on what the ideal beauty standard is in Cambodia. This article discusses what the beauty standard is, when beauty standards first appeared, why beauty standards exist, and what the negative impact of beauty standards have on Cambodian women (e.g., women using whitening creams).